

By the Woman Who Fed the Fires of Poet M

Georgette Leblanc, Known to the World as Ma His Wife) Writes the Surprising Story and Most Extraordinary Romance of All Hist



Madame
Georgette
after
she
had
escaped
from
her
first
husband,
in her
great
role
of
Massenet's
"Sapho."

By Georgette Leblanc

CHAPTER III.

Her Extraordinary Wedding Night—She Gains Her Freedom.

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(Continued from Last Sunday)

I HAVE already told you of the marriage ceremony into which I entered with a man I could not consider a husband for the purpose of securing my freedom from my father and fulfilling my destiny.

I was determined that I would be a wife in name only to this man and he had accepted my conditions. Now began the work of holding him to his word. To have allowed him any of the rights of a husband would indeed have seemed unspeakable sacrilege to me, and I believe it would have killed me with shame, for I was convinced that I was destined heart and soul for a different existence.

I found that against my girlish innocence and ideals were arrayed man's brute strength, man-made laws and all the conventions of society. I had indeed succeeded in fighting off all unwelcome evidences of affection on the part of my new husband on our wedding journey. I had ingeniously managed that he should not have me

try. She was going to look after me for a time. I had never seen this apartment. I had stipulated that it was to remain unfurnished, except for our two rooms, because we were going to live in it such a short time. In the first place, I took a look at the hallway. My husband lighted the gas. Then I walked after him up the passage until I came to a door.

"Here is your room," he said, stopping before a door, which he opened for me. I thought he showed some excitement as he did so.

What was the meaning of all this elegance that met my eye, these foolish preparations, this display of lace and pink satin? My husband must have given considerable attention to these matters and spent an unnecessary amount of money on them. They produced a very disagreeable effect on me. The decorations, the bedstead and furniture were, indeed, in very bad taste, loaded down with pink and blue satin and plush, and festooned with ribbons and draperies. Everything was arranged as if for a conventional bridal.

What was the meaning of all this care?

Why spend so much money for the few days that I expected to stay here?

Quite instinctively and rather thoughtlessly I asked him:

"Where is your room?"

"At the other end of the corridor," he answered.

I gathered all my courage together. After all, there did not seem to be much to be frightened about. But I felt it better to pretend indifference, and I held back the words that were burning my tongue.

alone with him in a railway compartment during our ride to Paris. But far more difficult trials of my courage and powers of resistance awaited me. The wedding night and other nights had to be faced. When we arrived at the railway station it happened that two friends of my husband were going to the same quarter as ourselves, and that only one cab was available.

"You must leave your friends at their home," I said to him with a sudden inspiration.

He looked annoyed, but there was nothing else to do. He left his friends at their house, and a moment later I found myself at the doorway of my new residence with my master. Our flat was on the second floor. After opening the door he struck a match, and I entered after him, with fluttering heart and trembling knees.

No servants were in waiting to receive us. He told me that the next morning his old nurse, who had brought him up from a child, would arrive from the country.

He sat down on the divan at the foot of the bed and invited me, with an alluring smile, to take a place at his side.

"Why do you not take off your hat and your coat?" he asked, in a tone that seemed to me a little authoritative. "They must be uncomfortable."

"No, no; they are all right. I feel better like this, thank you," I answered, rather nervously.

I felt it more difficult than ever to retain my self-possession. What was the meaning of this fear which weighed upon me? I had known this man for three months, and there was nothing very terrible about him. I looked at my face in the glass. It was pale as death.

I sat down near him. Before I could move away he took my hands. I was afraid he was going to make love to me again, and I began to talk hurriedly about my plans in order to head him off.

"After to-morrow morning I shall go again and visit the singing professor—you know the man I mean—the one I went to see with Madame Chardou."

Why did his hand burn me so? Actually it was hurting me. I hardly dared to take my own away from him, and so I went on talking.

"You know, I found out a little later that she went to see him by order of my father, to ask him to discourage me from becoming a singer. The professor, it seems, has a young daughter, and my father appealed to his sentiments of paternal love, his principles, his honor, and I know not what else to discourage me. I found out all about it through a servant who overheard a conversation between Madame Chardou and her husband. I am curious, extremely curious, to know what the professor will say to me now that I am FREE."

The Husband Disregards His Pledges

I emphasized my last word very strongly. The words came out of my mouth as if they were driven by a machine. A horrible fear was suffocating me. Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! If I could not control myself better I should soon be crying out: "Help! Help!"

But why should I behave like this? There was nothing to be afraid of. Saying this to myself, I regained my composure a little and went on talking about the professor and his lessons. I spoke of everything that I wished to study, to know and to admire in wonderful Paris. I spoke of my programme of work and my system of discipline by which I expected to learn a great deal in a few months. I dared not raise my eyes to his face. Instead, I looked about me on every side, pretending to be a person very much at ease who takes an interest in her surroundings.

"That little lamp hanging from the ceiling is charming," I said.

Thank Heaven! For a moment I felt my face relieved from his look! Hastily I stole a glance at him. I discovered that he, too, was looking pale.

"How hot it is in here," I said. "Do you not think so? Suppose we open the windows?"

Before he could answer I ran to the long windows, with a nervous movement, and threw them open. Some belated merry-makers went by occasionally, laughing and talking. They made me feel less alone with this man, and therefore a little more comfortable. I seated myself on the stone windowsill.

"It is amusing to be so near the sidewalk, isn't it?" I asked.

"There are still people on the boulevard." I leant further out of the window, as if I were looking at some one. As a matter of fact, there was nobody there at the moment. Why did I say that? It was because I had to say something. Silence frightened me like some immense monster. I went on with my childish talk:

his side to share the triumphs, while Georgette Leblanc, who tributed so much to his fame, was left behind.

The astonishing romance of Maeterlinck and Georgette Leblanc, perhaps, without a parallel in real life, and few novelists or scenario-writers have had the courage to imagine a human romance so unique.

As a young girl in a small French city Georgette read and worshipped with fluttering heart the poems of the far-away poet and dedicated her life to her unseen hero. Her single-mindedness was to fit herself for intellectual companionship with this some day offer to him anything, everything, that was hers—of mind or spirit or beauty or body to feed the consuming flame of Maeterlinck's genius. In return she asked nothing.

The story of this extraordinary romance is for the first time from week to week on this page by Georgette Leblanc herself bargained with a devoted lover for a loveless marriage so advance herself on the path toward Maeterlinck, and resolute off the new husband's advances and preserved her maidenly self the man she was saving herself for.

And how this young bride became a wife in name only to the man she married for her own ends—and later became a wife in all but the legal ceremony of the poet Maeterlinck.

And when, after years of unselfish devotion to Maeterlinck, asking no reward, never suggesting marriage, she found his interest cooling, she brought in a young girl and offered her to feed his genius and entertain him—and stepped philosophically down and out of Maeterlinck's life.

"In the country everybody is asleep at this hour, think. What time is it?"

He did not look at his watch. He kept on looking me. Then he answered nervously:

"I do not know—2 o'clock, perhaps—about 2 o'clock—that is, I think so."

How his voice trembled! The fresh night air blew upon me, and I gave a little shiver.

"You will catch cold," he said, solicitously. "I don't want you to be ill."

He placed a coat over my shoulders, and as he did his hand touched my neck. At that moment I could not help uttering a little cry. Then I leant on the railing of the balcony, and, regretting my apparent rudeness, I endeavored to make amends for it.

"I do not know what is the matter with me this evening," I said. "I am very nervous."

"Of course, you are tired after all the excitement of the day," he answered. "You ought to go to bed."

A Strange Wedding Night

As he spoke these words he seized my hand, pressed it suddenly, bent over and covered it with kisses. It was the most dreadful moment of my life up to that time. Right under my eyes I could see the veins in his temple swelling up. I could see that the blood was rushing to his head. I noted his strong, thick neck protruding from his white collar. I observed his broad, powerful shoulder bent down before me. How big and strong he was, at how small and weak I was compared to him!

Fear almost stopped my heart. Suddenly and instinctively I made up my mind to act. I had only woman's craft and ruse to save me, and I would make use of them. Still pretending to be very calm, I stood up and said:

"You are right; I shall take cold. Will you please close the window for me and draw the curtains?"

With slow steps I went toward the door while he was busy with the window. In a mechanical way I put down my hat and my coat on the bed and with my free hand nervously seized the handle of the door. At the moment made by the lock he turned suddenly. Our eyes met. His tall figure stood out against the dark velvet of the curtains. His hands were clenched and his face pale. But his eyes! Ah! his eyes—I had never seen anything like them before! They held me riveted in the doorway. They prevented me from breathing. They seized me by the throat. With a hoarse, raucous voice he stammered out words without connection.

For the first time he spoke familiarly to me and begged to use wild language, in which endearments and abuse were mingled.

"Stay where you are, my adorable little one," I cried. "Ah! do not try to run away from me, you little fool. You do not know what you are doing. We are so happy together. Try to escape from me, you little vixen, and I will do terrible things to you. You are mine. I can do what I please with you. I can catch you anywhere. I will!"

He said many dreadful things to me which I will not repeat. I knew little about men then, and I almost thought that he was mad. He did not move toward me at first, for he saw that at the first movement on his part I should fly.

The whole width of the bedroom was between us. I that space there was the bed, a table and some chair. I wished to speak, to protest indignantly at his conduct but I could not. I wanted to look behind me and see whether I could retreat, but I felt that I was holding him by my look, just as a puny trainer is supposed to hold the ferocious tiger ready to leap upon him. We remained